

1. For my regular's, let me start with some good news: We're done discussing Babylon's fall and the man who overthrew that empire. For three lessons now, Isaiah's pretty much beaten to death the fall of that empire, which as I love to state wasn't even a significant player on the scene until a 100 years after his time. Three lessons ago, the focus was on Babylon's fall from the perspective of the loser. Two lessons ago the focus was on the same event from the winner's perspective where the conquering hero, Cyrus is considered "a" messianic figure as he allowed the Israelites to go home. The last lesson discussed that event from the Israelites perspective. The good news is since we've now discussed to death, Isaiah can move on. The last lesson essentially criticized the Israelites for failing to go back to their land after an obvious miracle of God allowing them to return there.
 - a) If Isaiah's done with that issue, where does he go from there? That's the really good news. He moves on from describing "a" messiah to describing the coming of "the" one. All that means is we are starting a section that describes in fairly vivid detail aspect of what Jesus will do in both His First and Second Coming.
 - b) Remember that Isaiah lived roughly 700 years prior to Jesus First Coming. If you have any doubts that God actually communicated history in advance to Isaiah about what'll happen in Jesus First Coming, read on. For us Christians who have some knowledge of the Gospel accounts, it'll be amazing to read how well Isaiah "knew of Jesus" many centuries prior to any of the events of Jesus First Coming takes place.
2. OK John, we're only on Page 1, and you're preaching to choir again. Most of us reading this study already believe Jesus is God, already believe Isaiah was inspired by God and yes you can assume we believe this book was written many hundred of years prior to Jesus walking the earth. As you love to say to us, now what? What do you want us to get out of these chapters other than the fact God told Isaiah of Jesus ministry many centuries before it occurred? As usual, so glad you asked!
 - a) First, realize these chapters are effectively written to you and me. The first line of Chapter 49 addresses "distant lands". In other words, Isaiah's addressing non-Israelites.
 - b) Next, remember where Isaiah left off. He was effectively talking to Israelites living under the Babylonian captivity as if to remind them God's still there, despite the fact His temple in Jerusalem is gone and most of the Israelites will now live outside of that land. My "now what" for you and me (here's the important part), is when we're face a tough experience of our own, these two chapters effectively remind us that despite what we're dealing with at the moment, despite whatever problems we're facing, if we've messed up our life to date, God's still there and still wants to guide us for His glory. Therefore, this lesson is a God-given "I'm still here" (my lesson title) speech, no matter what we've done with our life.
 - c) OK again John, we know God's still there and still guiding us through the rough moments of our lives. Why remind us of this? Because there are times where I find most Christians go through, where we feel like God's gone silent. Times come where we think everything is falling apart and we don't sense God working in our lives. As one who's now living the Christian life for a long time, I can assure you those times come. One has to realize God is still there and such "silent times" is when we have to lean on the bible to remind ourselves He is still there, He is still guiding us and yes He still has a plan for our lives.
 - d) Put yourselves in the sandals of the Israelites living at the time Isaiah's describing: When all the Israelites were scattered around the Middle East and the land of Israel uninhabited by Israelites. You can imagine how they felt God let them down, "it's over" and we might as well make the best of the time we have left to live as God's no longer guiding our lives.
 - e) It is those types of "tough times" where chapters like these two come into play in our lives. They're much more than saying "Jesus is coming and here's some proof text as Isaiah tells us history in advance." It's the reminder to the Israelites that God still has a plan for them just as God still has a plan for us Christians even when life isn't going well at the moment.

3. Given all of that, I'd like you to follow along with me through these two chapters as we learn a lot of things Jesus did in His First Coming with some aspects of what He'll do in His Second Coming in these two chapters. Yes we should learn it, as we'll be there to experience life under the Second Coming as God makes us Christians a part of His eternal plans for humanity.
 - a) Over and above that, most of the text here in these chapters is to remind us that God still desires to guide us even in times for whatever reason, we don't feel close to Him.
 - b) As we remind ourselves of what He did for us in His First Coming and read of what Jesus will do for us in His Second Coming, it reminds us how real all of this is, and to keep our faith in Him strong during those moments where it feels like our life is falling apart.
4. OK John, this sounds depressing. What if things are going pretty well right now and I'm feeling confident about my relationship with God at the moment? Just remember that times come to all believers when God "backs away" as if to test us to see how loyal we'll be during such times. We have to realize such "empty times" are God filtered and are there to remind us that He's still there to guide us even if we don't sense that presence.
5. Before I begin the verse by verse lecture, let me address the nonbelievers and skeptics who might be reading this lesson: If you have doubts that Jesus is God, I ask that you read the text assuming that the Old Testament was written long before the New Testament was written and ask yourself is this talking about Jesus or not? I'll argue that between this lesson and the next few, it'll become clear that Jesus is who He claims to be and we'll talk about what that means in both this lesson as well as the next few coming up. Bottom line, read along and hopefully it'll be worth reading.
6. For the rest of us, I ask that you follow along with my "God's still there" lesson as hopefully it will strengthen our faith in Him as we read what was predicted about Jesus long before He ever came on the scene. Further, reminding our self about "God's still there" is a good thing to keep in mind when those silent times do come in our life. With that said, time to break down and start the text.
7. Chapter 49, Verse 1: Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the LORD called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name.
 - a) One of the many things I've learned about Isaiah to date is, when he wants to address not just the Israelites, but all people, Isaiah likes the expression translated "islands and distant lands". It's just his way of saying "everybody pay attention". He's writing this way so we can realize that God wants to draw attention to anyone willing to listen to Him.
 - b) To put it simply, this next speech is not just for the Israelites, but also for us gentiles (that just is referring to is anyone who is not Jewish) to pay attention.
 - c) OK John, we've got that. So what is it God's trying to tell us here through Isaiah?
 - i) Let's look at Verse 1 from the standpoint of clues:
 - ii) Whoever this "I" is, God had called "him" before he was born.
 - iii) From "his birth" God made mention of his name.
 - iv) Yes one can argue it refers to Israel as a nation, but the "world" didn't know of its birth and did God announce to the world its birth? One can possibly argue that it is Israel based on the dramatic way they left Egypt via the plagues etc.
 - v) Of course I'll argue it also refers to Jesus. Luke's Gospel describes angels telling us of Jesus birth. Within a century of Jesus life and death, Christianity had spread all over the Roman Empire as the disciples were scattered after Jesus death.
 - vi) All I'm saying at this point is Verse 1 gives us a clue (and many more are coming) that since God is a "Jewish God" He's either telling the world of the significance of the birth of the nation of Israel or the birth of the Messiah coming up.
 - vii) Since I said in my introduction that Isaiah's moving from discussing "a" messianic figure to "the" Messianic figure, I'm arguing that for a good portion of this chapter, Isaiah's going to build a case for the world (that's you and me) to pay attention as "The" Messiah will be coming on the scene.
 - viii) All I'm trying to say is, "Pay attention, Isaiah's telling us of how "THE" Messiah is coming into the world and focusing on that helps us through our "dark times".

8. Verse 2: He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver.
- a) I just debated in the previous verse that one can argue that God's referring to Israel as a nation or specifically Jesus. Here we get three more clues about who Isaiah's talking of:
 - i) The first is, whenever this entity speaks, his speech "cut to the heart" like a sharp sword. I can't think of anyone else in history whose words were so powerful, that multitudes of people refer to Him as the Lord of their lives.
 - ii) When we read the words Jesus spoke, consider how much they convict us of how it is we're supposed to live. That's the "sharpened sword" of this verse
 - iii) The second clue is "in the shadow of his hand he hid me". Think of that term as a person being protected by God Himself. Again, one can argue it is Israel as God's the one who kept that nation "around" despite all the efforts to destroy them to the date of this book, let alone today. However, by the time we get to Verse 5, it'll be a lot more obvious the focus is on Jesus Himself.
 - iv) OK then, how does "in the shadow of his hand he hid me" tie to Jesus? I've always held the view that Jesus time on earth was always in His control. Jesus was never a well-intended person who got in "over his head" and accidentally got Himself to the cross because He preached against the authorities at hand. All I'm saying is all the events of Jesus First Coming was organized on God the Father's timing and all of it was planned before it ever occurred down to the date of the crucifixion and of His resurrection. All I'm saying is the entire time span of when Jesus came to when He returned to Heaven was all part of God's plan.
 - v) My point is God protected Jesus during the time span of His First Coming so Jesus was able to accomplish the will of God the Father on His timing.
 - vi) OK we're almost done: The last phrase is "polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver". For you non-arrow shooters a "quiver" is a device to hold arrows until it's taken out of the quiver to fire. This is an expression people use to indicate if one's words "pierce our hearts" like an arrow piercing its target.
 - b) Let's put it all together. Isaiah's giving us clues of the Messiah coming, whose words will penetrate our hearts like a sharp arrow. God the Father will bring Him into our world on His timing into the land of Israel to strictly do God the Father's will. He will protect Jesus so that His will gets done and all that God the Father desires to accomplish through Him will get done.
 - c) Of all things, that also describes the life of those of us who've dedicated our lives to being a witness to Jesus. It means the actions we take are "God filtered" and we live as long as it is God the Father's will so that we can use our lives for His glory. I'm not implying that I am perfect at this. I'm just saying the time I get to live is effectively in His Hands as He is aware of all things and knows how my life will play out before it ever occurs.
 - d) On that positive note, I believe we're ready for the next verse.
9. Verse 3: He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor."
- a) I will be the first to admit, Verse 3 read out of context appears to be describing the nation of Israel. To explain this, first remember an important rule when studying the bible:
 - i) "A text taken out of context becomes a pretext". In other words, never read a bible verse out of context of the surrounding text.
 - b) With that said, let me explain further. The word Israel itself means "Governed by God".
 - i) It was used to describe the Israelite nation as God intended them to live as if God governed them. The common ancestor of all Israelites was named Jacob. God did rename him "Israel" to remind him that he is now to live as governed by God.
 - c) With that said, let me quote Verse 5 coming up: "And now the LORD says-- he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD and my God has been my strength--"

- i) My simple point is whoever this "Israel" is in Verse 3, was formed in the womb to "bring Jacob back to Him and gather Israel to himself".
 - ii) Let me make this simple: One of the main reasons for Jesus coming when He did, was to "gather all of the nation Israel" to Himself. Stop and realize why God made us in the first place, because He loves us and wants to spend eternity getting close to us. That's why He separated the Israelites to begin with. So that He could draw close to them and spend eternity with them. So does that mean if the Israelites did accept Jesus the cross wouldn't have happened? The short answer is, who knows? I just know that God knew in advance the Israelites would reject that offer, which is why it was God the Father's will for Jesus to pay the price for the sins of those of us willing to accept that payment and trust that He's in charge of our lives. That's the Gospel message in a paragraph.
 - iii) If you think I'm exaggerating when I say, "gather Israel to Himself" consider Jesus own words when He said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing." (Matthew 23:37, NKJV). My point is that Jesus Himself stated it was His desire to gather all of the Israelites together as those willing to be governed by God but as Jesus said, "you (Israel collectively) were not willing".
 - d) All of this leads me back to Verse 3. My point is when the text speaks of "Israel" in Verse Three, and if one reads ahead to Verse 5, it becomes pretty obvious that Verse 3 isn't about the entire nation of Israel but about a specific "entity" that is "Governed by God", which is what the word Israel means.
 - e) With that said, let's quickly talk about the rest of Verse 3. Isaiah states that God calls His servant "Israel" (a title for Jesus here) in which God will display His splendor. All that is saying is that God the Father will accomplish His will through Jesus in what He will do.
 - f) Remember in my introduction how I said this lesson is about the reminder of how God's still there during the silent times? The early verses of this chapter are written to the world to explain how we'll recognize "The" Messiah when He comes. Then most of the text will get into the issue of standing firm in our faith even during those "silent" periods. All that I'm saying is please bear with me as I go through the first half dozen verses. They explain just who "The" Messiah is, before we get to the main point of these two chapters.
 - g) With that said, Verse 4.
10. Verse 4: But I said, "I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing. Yet what is due me is in the LORD's hand, and my reward is with my God."
- a) Time for one of my loose translations: It will appear like Jesus "wasted a trip" from the standpoint of accomplishing the goal of gathering the Israelites to worship Him.
 - b) Let's assume there were a million people living in Israel at the time of Jesus. Maybe it was a lot more, or maybe a lot less. However, of that multitude let's be honest, there was only a small percentage of them who accepted Jesus as the Messiah and that was only after He had risen from the dead. I'm speculating that lots of people were willing to watch Him do a miracle. Less were willing to hear His sermons. Less were willing to follow Him as His teacher. Only 12 were called Apostles (literally "sent ones"). My whole point is from the standpoint of all of Israel as a nation, it would seem that Jesus' mission was a failure.
 - c) Yet to state the obvious, the worship of Jesus as God spread through the entire Empire of Rome within a century. Today there are billions who call themselves Christians. All I am saying is that Israel's "rejection" of the Messiah became the world's acceptance of Him, at least for the multitudes of us who do accept Jesus as God and in charge of our lives.
 - d) The point is despite that "failure", at least from the perspective that the nation of Israel did fail to accept Him as the Messiah, yet the mission was a success because Jesus did do what it was God the Father wanted Him to do, pay the price of all sins.

- e) The final point of Verse 4 is that the mission may have been a failure from the perspective of the Israelites, but was a success from God the Father's perspective as Jesus was willing to pay that price for all sins. Those of us who do accept that payment will spend eternity with Him as it's not based on us, it's solely based on what He did, period. My point here is that Jesus was rewarded for His effort as Verse 4 indicates as He's now seated at God's right hand (however that works) in heaven.
 - i) Way back when we discussed Isaiah seeing God's throne in Chapter 5, I admit it's tough to picture a God who controls everything to have a physical form, let alone sit in a chair. The way I view it is, if God is going to create an eternity where each of us can get close to Him, it has to be some sort of physical world where we can get close to Him. Therefore, such a "throne room" exists. Further, if Jesus became fully human for our sake, He'll always be fully human as well as fully God, so that He will exist forever in this world create for believers to draw close to God for all of eternity. All I'm saying is if God manifests Himself in a physical form so we can draw close to Him, so Jesus will be at His right hand side so we can draw close to Him as well.
 - f) In the meantime, it's time to take on Verse 5 for the second time:
- 11. Verse 5: And now the LORD says-- he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD and my God has been my strength--⁶ he says: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."
 - a) Verse 5 we can do quickly as we've already discussed it in our "Verse 3" discussion. It is simply saying that God the Father allowed Jesus to be "formed in the womb" (i.e., a way of describing the virgin birth) with the purpose of gathering Israel close to Him so they could spend eternity close to Him. That gets me back to Jesus quote about His desire to gather the Israelites together as a "mother hen gathering her young" but because they did reject Him as their Messiah, He did go to the cross at that point.
 - b) That leads to the second phrase of Verse 5, "I am honored in the eyes of the LORD". Think of that phrase as telling the Israelites that no matter what they think of Jesus, as far as God the Father is concerned, "Jesus is honored in what He did".
 - c) Stop and think about this from the perspective of the Israelites hearing this at the time of Isaiah. That was seven centuries before Jesus came on the scene. The idea is to give that nation hope for the future, despite the threat of large empires conquering them. Despite the threat of being taken out of their homes to a foreign land. Yes it's a reminder to us of the fact that "God's still there" no matter what we're dealing with in our lives. Even when we are rejected, we get the reminder that God's still there guiding us even when the times come of not sensing His presence at that moment.
 - d) All of that leads to Verse 6, which is effectively part of the same sentence as Verse 5.
 - i) The key point is that over and above the fact that Jesus came into the world with a purpose of uniting all of the nation of Israel under His leadership, another way we would recognize the Messiah when He comes, is God the Father would make Him a "light to the Gentiles". If that phrase seems familiar, it is because it is effectively quoted a few times in the New Testament (Luke 2:32, Acts 13:47 and 26:32).
 - ii) That phrase was quoted to Mary when she was told that Jesus would be a "light to the Gentiles" (Luke 2:32) and the apostle Paul picked up on that same phrase as he used it as he preached to the Gentiles he was speaking to in Acts 13:47 and 26.32.
 - e) Think about these verses from the standpoint of having hope in the future. When Isaiah's writing this, the Israelites were threatened with extinction from the Assyrians. About 100 years in the future, the Israelites will all be living outside of the land of Israel. My point is at times we all need hope. Isaiah's promising hope, to everyone who trusts in God.

- i) The concept of trusting in a better future is much more than believing in the idea of a "Messiah" ruling over the world one day. It's a reminder that God still has a wonderful plan for our lives and is well aware of all we're going through. When we are struggling through a difficult problem that we think will never end, God is reminding us, He's still there, He knows all things, He knows how long we'll have to deal with that issue and He has a wonderful plan for us, not only to draw close to Him for all of eternity, but also for this lifetime.
 - ii) That reminder leads me back to these verses. Here is Isaiah stating 700 years prior to Jesus even being on the scene that both Jewish people and non-Jewish folks will look to Him as the promised Messiah. For my Jewish friends reading this, do you really think another person is going to come on the scene who us Gentiles believe is God more than Jesus? That fact that Verse 6 says that the promised Messiah will be a "light to the Gentiles" is a wonderful way of proving Jesus is the Messiah. All one has to do is consider all the billions of people today who consider Jesus to be the fulfillment of that promise.
 - f) OK John, you're preaching to the choir again. We believe Jesus is the Promised Messiah. What I'd like you to notice is the final phrase of Verse 6. It says "He will bring salvation to the ends of the earth." One has to admit that after 2,000 years of recorded history, Jesus is thought of as bringing salvation to people all over the world. It's amazing to consider that an obscure person who was one of thousands to die on a cross when the Roman Empire is the center of world power, went on to be worshipped by billions. My point is simply how literally Verse 6 has come true. If we can trust Isaiah to tell us the truth of what Jesus did accomplish 2,000 years ago has literally come true, then we can also trust Him to tell us of God's eternal plans for our future no matter what we're dealing with at the moment.
12. Verse 7: This is what the LORD says-- the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel-- to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers: "Kings will see you and rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."
- a) If you have any doubts that Isaiah was writing about Jesus seven centuries before He ever came on the scene, Verse 7 should erase those doubts. The verse describes this Messiah as "The Redeemer and Holy One of Israel...who was despised and abhorred by the nation".
 - i) My point is Isaiah is definitely describing the Messiah when he uses terms like the Redeemer (of our sins) and the Holy One of Israel.
 - ii) Now notice the phrase, "abhorred by the nation". Remember how much Jesus was rejected by the Israelites when He came on the scene? No other person in recorded history has been corporately rejected by His own people yet worshipped as being God by billions of non-Jewish people. All I'm saying is if you want proof of Jesus being this promised Messiah, Isaiah's doing a great job of describing history many centuries before it occurred.
 - iii) Suppose one thinks, "How do we know Jesus wasn't just a "made up fairy tale that is fitting what was predicted about Him?" The answer is historians outside of the bible record Jesus as being a real person. Even religious Jewish people will argue that Jesus was a real person. They just refuse to acknowledge Him as the Messiah.
 - iv) The main reason Jesus is rejected is He didn't overthrow the Roman Empire as to set up His eternal kingdom back then. In other words, they don't believe anyone has to die for their sins, just rule and reign.
 - b) Speaking of "ruling and reigning", that leads me perfectly to the rest of this verse. It tells us that kings and powerful people will acknowledge Jesus as God. My favorite example of this is the French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. For those who don't know history he conquered much of Europe at one point. He wrote near the end of his life of the millions who worshiped and idolized Jesus far more than him, and he realized Jesus must be God.

- i) All I'm saying is throughout history since the time of Jesus there have been many a ruler that acknowledged Jesus as God just as this verse said they would.
 - ii) Finally Verse 7 says that they (kings) will worship Jesus because God chose Him to accomplish this mission. So does that mean God looked over a crowd of angels as to ask, "Who volunteers to go be a human and die for everyone's sins?" Of course not. If God randomly choose some angelic being to suffer for the sake of our sins, to put it mildly, it wouldn't be fair to that angel. But by God Himself being the one to pay for our sins, a "Perfect God" would pay the perfect penalty for them.
 - iii) My point is as Verse 7 says, "God chose you", it doesn't mean Jesus was picked in a random line up. It means, God planned this out from His eternal all-knowing plan to let Jesus pay the price for our sins. That's why God could inspire Isaiah to write about Jesus so many centuries before it actually occurred.
 - iv) Remember how I wrote in my introduction about what to do when God goes silent on us? It's to remember facts like those what's in Isaiah that all this is very real.
13. Verse 8: This is what the LORD says: "In the time of my favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances,⁹ to say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!' "They will feed beside the roads and find pasture on every barren hill.¹⁰ They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat upon them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water.
- a) My loose translation: Hey everyone, "THE" Messiah is coming, although it's not going to happen today. Rejoice in the fact He is coming. When that happens people won't have to worry about life anymore, as God will satisfy our needs.
 - b) OK John, Jesus came 2,000 years ago. Let's be honest most of us still have needs such as to be able to provide for ourselves or our family. We still need to deal with sickness to state an obvious example. So if Isaiah is preaching, "Be free" as in Verse 9, what is it we're free from? To state the obvious, having to worry about being good enough to please God, as it is no longer an issue of being "good enough" for God to be a Christian. Jesus also satisfies our desire to worship God. That's what Jesus meant when He said that He is living water that always satisfies us. (See John 4:14).
 - c) But doesn't Verse 10 state that the desert heat will no longer beat upon people? I'm pretty sure people have suffered in the heat since Jesus came on the scene to state the obvious.
 - i) Let me put it this way: To be a Christian never means that life will now be easy. It doesn't mean we no longer have to take care of our health or provide for ourselves. It just means our built-in spiritual desire to worship God will be satisfied.
 - ii) But doesn't other religions satisfy a need to worship God? Yes and no. I never say that other religions don't have practical benefits. All I'm saying is Christianity as it was meant to be performed means we don't have to prove our worth to God. What is the great advantage of Christianity is we never have to be good enough for God. We do good works not to earn His favor, but only out of gratitude for what He has done for us and because it's the best way to live our lives.
 - d) Don't these verses also speak of a future "utopia" where people will literally never have to worry about such obvious needs as finding water to survive? Yes they have hints of what life will be like in Jesus Second Coming. However, until that event occurs, the main thing Jesus wants us to have is the peace of not having to worry about the future. I know many of you are dealing with all sorts of tragedies at the moment. I'm not saying life isn't hard. All I'm saying is God promises us peace through the trials of life. That's the satisfaction as described in these verses. Yes a utopia will come one day when Jesus returns, but until it occurs Jesus wants us to have peace knowing we don't have to earn His love until then.
 - e) With that said, we can now pick up the pace a little as I hope we're all starting to get the flavor of what Isaiah's trying to communicate to us about Jesus coming into our world.

14. Verse 11: I will turn all my mountains into roads, and my highways will be raised up.
- a) Remember what God's desire is, "For all of us who desire to seek God to get close to Him as to spend eternity together with Him." That's why I like to speculate that when we get to heaven, we'll all exist in more than three dimensions so we can all draw close to Him.
 - b) Believe it or not that idea leads to Verse 11. In a world before flying existed, mountains were a "roadblock" to get somewhere. So does this mean when Jesus returns there will be no more mountains that block the access to get to God? Let's be honest, those of us living today in effect are spoiled because we can get in cars and airplanes to get to places which were hard to get to in Isaiah's day. One can take this verse "spiritually" as if to say any or all things that can block our relationship with God will be removed, or one can see it very literally as access roads to reach God will be taken away.
 - c) So John are you saying we all have to move to Jerusalem to get close to God? While I just visited that city for the first time this year, it's not a requirement to believe in God. While we are to gather together as believers to worship Him as to help each other draw close to Him, the "where" isn't as nearly as much an issue as much as if we make the effort to seek Him living under the rules God laid out for us in the bible. Yes Jesus did say His desire is to gather all believers together to seek Him, but in effect we do that when we gather with other believers to worship Him. To use an illustration I like, I have three brothers. All of us don't have to be in the same room to realize we're brothers. We are, because we are. In that same sense, we as Christians don't have to ALL collectively get together in this world in order to worship God, we're "brothers" just because we are. End of issue.
 - d) Meanwhile, Verse 12:
15. Verse 12: See, they will come from afar-- some from the north, some from the west, some from the region of Aswan. "
- a) Whenever I read that verse, my first question is always, "Where is Aswan"? Most experts argue it refers to China of all places. Others say it's small part of the Middle East. To read it in context, I believe Isaiah was trying to think of the most distant place he could think of as if to say, God's going to gather His people from everywhere we can think of, even if it's the most remote place in the world from the perspective of being in Israel.
 - b) The point is when Jesus returns, people will be gathered from around the world as to live under His reign. Mountains won't be a roadblock to get there. I suspect the cost of travel won't be a roadblock either. All I'm saying is that it is God's desire to gather believers all together to be with them for eternity. When that utopia arrives, getting there won't be an issue we have to worry about.
16. Verse 13: Shout for joy, O heavens; rejoice, O earth; burst into song, O mountains! For the LORD comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones. ¹⁴ But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me."
- a) Remember why Isaiah's breaking into this "praise fest" to begin with. When he wrote this most Israelites were turning to other gods. Even in the coming century when all Israelites are taken out of that land, God wants to remind them that He's still there.
 - b) Stop and consider those moments when we have our own doubts about God being able to help us or we don't feel His presence at the moment. What these verses remind us is that God's still there, we should still praise Him, still have joy in our hearts and trust that He'll come through no matter how good or how bad our situation looks.
 - c) So are you saying, "Don't worry, be happy?" Of course we can't turn a blind eye to what it is we have to deal with. I'm just saying that no matter what we have to face, God wants to help us through life and guide us so we can make a difference for Him. I believe we have a duty to be joyful even if we don't feel it at the moment. Would you rather be with a man or woman who's joyful or depressing? All I'm saying is we have a duty as Christians to be joyful so that joy can be shared with others. I'm not saying we can't be sad when we have to deal with obvious tragedies. It's our duty to be joyful as that's what He wants us to be.

- d) But what about tragedies we have to face? These verses remind us to be joyful in spite of that tragedy. I'm not saying, "Hey I'm in horrible pain right now, but I'm happy." All I'm saying is that at any given moment we can't always control our circumstances but we can always control our attitude through those circumstances. That's why Isaiah is reminding us that God's there, we can have joy realizing we don't have to try to please Him, but just enjoy our relationship with Him through whatever we're dealing with at this moment.
- e) On that happy note, let's move on.
17. Verse 15: "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! ¹⁶ See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me.
- a) Isaiah's trying to think of obvious illustrations of ways of saying it's impossible for God to forget those He's called. Isaiah uses an illustration of a mother forgetting who her children are. He uses the illustration of a tattoo on one's hands. In both cases, the point isn't about anything literal, it's just trying to communicate the idea that God can't "not love" what it is He's committed to love in the first place.
- b) Now think of a time we've really messed up. We can easily think, "I've messed up my life so bad, God can't possibly still care for me." To use my opening illustration of God going silent, it's the reminder He's still there. It's thinking, "I'm no good to anyone, why would God ever want me to be part of His eternal kingdom let alone use some of my time to go make a difference for Him now?" That's why God reminds us He still cares about us.
- c) To use the classic line, "We can't change our past, just learn from it and move on". That is what God's trying to communicate to us. Since He can't stop caring about us, He wants us to never stop caring about Him. Even if we've messed up to date, He wants a relationship with us "so bad", He's willing to forgive us so we turn to Him. If that's true why don't we just wait until our deathbed to accept Jesus? For starters, we may die in a way where it is impossible to do that. Second and more importantly, the best way to have joy in our lives is if we use them and use the gifts God's given us for His glory. As an example, I do write because I can't stand not doing it, as well as other things I believe God wants me to do.
- d) Meanwhile, time to take a break from all this happiness to get back to Isaiah.
18. Verse 17: Your sons hasten back, and those who laid you waste depart from you.
- a) To understand this verse try to think of them in terms of life when Jesus came. Remember that most Israelites rejected Jesus as being in charge of their life. It's the age-old concept of wanting to prove our worth to God versus just accepting Him as being God and living as He desire we live. That's why Isaiah jumps from "praise fest" and "God still loves you" to a verse about how most people reject His love. It's the idea that despite His unconditional love for us, most people reject that concept.
19. Verse 18: Lift up your eyes and look around; all your sons gather and come to you. As surely as I live," declares the LORD, "you will wear them all as ornaments; you will put them on, like a bride.
- a) Verse 18 is a "despite all of that" statement. It's effectively saying that despite the fact that most Israelites will reject Jesus, there will come a day when their descendants will look to Him as the Messiah.
- b) Let me explain that one: One of the important things to grasp is that God's unconditional promises are just that: "unconditional". The great example is Romans 9 through 11. That is where Paul explains that just as God's promise of unconditional forgiveness of our sins is unconditional to Christians, so God's promise that He will literally rule over the world from Jerusalem one day. I like to say that Romans 9 focuses on Israel "Pre-Jesus. Romans 10 focuses on Israel "post-Jesus (today). Romans 11 focuses on some future post-Christian time era where God will once again focus on primarily working through the Jewish nation as He'll rule the world from there. That's the "sons gathering" that Isaiah predicts here in this verse. That's when the Israelite descendants are gathered to God.

- c) When I see the word "ornament", I think of Christmas ornaments. The idea is ornaments are used to decorate something. Just like a bride looks beautiful on her wedding day so we get the picture of God "looking beautiful" as His bride (think you and me) being close to Him as we spend eternity together. That's the word picture of this verse.
20. Verse 19: "Though you were ruined and made desolate and your land laid waste, now you will be too small for your people, and those who devoured you will be far away.
- a) Remember when I said back in my opening paragraph that we're all done with Babylon? I lied a little in that Isaiah uses here as quick illustration: In the literal sense, it's saying as the nation of Israel was laid waste and the survivors were scattered over that empire, those who did the damage will suffer far more than whatever damage the Israelites did suffer.
- b) It's kind of "I'd hate to be in your shoes on judgment day as you bet on the wrong horse" type of statement. Picture a sign listing the nations and empires that have come and gone since the concept of the nation of Israel. Yet Israel is still around and all those other ones are long gone. That should be a good warning to Iran today to pick a current example.
- c) This verse is a reminder that betting on Jesus is the winning ticket in the long run! It also implies the land of Israel will be bigger one day as the Israelites living there at the time of Jesus return won't be enough land for all of them.
21. Verse 20: The children born during your bereavement will yet say in your hearing, 'This place is too small for us; give us more space to live in.'²¹ Then you will say in your heart, 'Who bore me these? I was bereaved and barren; I was exiled and rejected. Who brought these up? I was left all alone, but these--where have they come from?' "
- a) Again, we have a picture of rejection and the survivors of that rejection will be so many, a cry will effectively go out that more land is needed. Coming back to my lesson theme that "God's still there", this is the not so subtle reminder that we'll win in the end if we "bet on the right horse". (That is, trusting in Jesus as full payment of our sins and realizing He's in charge of our life.) The key to reading these verses is not to think about Israelites living a long time ago. It's the reminder to us when God goes silent or life gets really tough, all of us need to remember that He's still there and desires to guide our lives not so that each of us will say, have lots of money or power, but that our lives make a difference for Him.
- b) That's why these verses look back in hindsight as if to say, "Hey, how did we get to such a great place after suffering so much for so long?" That's why God wants us to be full of joy as His eternal plans are far greater than whatever we deal with in this lifetime.
22. Verse 22: This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "See, I will beckon to the Gentiles, I will lift up my banner to the peoples; they will bring your sons in their arms and carry your daughters on their shoulders.²³ Kings will be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. They will bow down before you with their faces to the ground; they will lick the dust at your feet. Then you will know that I am the LORD; those who hope in me will not be disappointed."
- a) We continue this move from "suffering to utopia". Here it essentially says that non-Jewish people will help them come back to God's land. Kings will honor and help them. A good example is the British Empire at its power peak in the early 20th Century, made a decree to allow Israelites to return there. After World War II, it became an official country again.
- b) Again, realize over the last 2,000 years all the European and Asian leaders that gave honor to Jesus as God. Remember the verses are describing Jesus as "THE" Messiah as God who is ruling over the world from heaven now, and literally from Israel in the future.
- c) OK time to bring this "utopia" back to reality. At this moment, we may be dealing with an issue that's overwhelming us or God may be silent in our lives. We assume Jesus will rule one day, how does any of that "utopia" help me here and now? It's to realize at the worst, whatever we face, will only be for "one lifetime" and how long is that versus eternity. As we wait for that day, we need to realize God's still there, He still wants to guide our lives for His glory and still wants to use our time to make a difference. In other words, it's all about our perspective as we deal with whatever issues we're facing right now.

23. Verse 24: Can plunder be taken from warriors, or captives rescued from the fierce? ²⁵ But this is what the LORD says: "Yes, captives will be taken from warriors, and plunder retrieved from the fierce; I will contend with those who contend with you, and your children I will save. I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh; they will be drunk on their own blood, as with wine. Then all mankind will know that I, the LORD, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob."
- a) Time for another of my loose translations: If a bunch of really big strong men captured a bunch of our stuff, are we alone strong enough to take it away from them? Probably not but the God we worship is more powerful than whatever it is we're dealing with. I (God) will make anyone whose hurt you (that's us) suffer far more and far longer than whatever we have to suffer in this lifetime for His name's sake.
 - b) Remember my lesson title of "I'm still here"? This is God reminding us when life is going horribly (like when the Israelites were taken into captivity) that despite our faults, despite however we may have messed up our lives to date, God still desires to have a relationship with us and use our lives for His glory. Yes life will be hard at times, but it's all worth the effort as God is our Savior (in charge of our lives), the Redeemer (bring us to heaven) and is the "Mighty One of Jacob" (a way of saying the God of the Israelites is the true God!
 - c) So how literal is this? Verse 25 says our "captors will eat their own flesh and be drunk on their own blood". Personally, I don't want to be close enough to find out. I'm wondering if it refers to the Persians as they conquered the Babylonians and made them suffer in the way being described here. It's one of those visual images that's so gruesome, one just sort of says, "God's going to deal with those entities that that are powerful now, so I don't have to fear them as God's power is greater than their power."
 - d) OK, Chapter 50 is only 11 verses and the same theme, so let's quickly continue:
24. Chapter 50, Verse 1: This is what the LORD says: "Where is your mother's certificate of divorce with which I sent her away? Or to which of my creditors did I sell you? Because of your sins you were sold; because of your transgressions your mother was sent away.
- a) This is Isaiah's colorful way of saying God hasn't forgotten about us. Remember I said we as believers go through times were God goes silent on us? That's when these verses are a great reminder to us that God's still there. Isaiah's saying, "God's never divorced us even if we think He's forgotten about us." The Israelites were "kicked out of the land" so they'd learn that God isn't to be messed with. It's the not so subtle reminder that we can suffer in this lifetime due to our sins, but at the same time we are still God's chosen people and we can't lose that privilege if we're trusting in Him for the complete payment of our sins and trusting Him to guide our lives.
 - b) As a simple example, if we steal or murder someone, we may go to prison, but we're still saved if we're trusting in Jesus for our salvation. We'll lose our opportunities to be a good witness for Jesus by sinning, which is why we avoid it as much as we can. Even with that reminder that sin is "painful", we get the other reminder here that He still loves us even if we falsely think we've messed up too bad that God could ever still care for us.
25. Verse 2: When I came, why was there no one? When I called, why was there no one to answer? Was my arm too short to ransom you? Do I lack the strength to rescue you? By a mere rebuke I dry up the sea, I turn rivers into a desert; their fish rot for lack of water and die of thirst. ³ I clothe the sky with darkness and make sackcloth its covering."
- a) It's time for another of my very loose translations: Don't we realize what God's capable of doing? Don't we realize who He is or how much power He has? The mistake we usually make is we realize "God is God", but we refuse to forgive ourselves. It's so common for us to think, "We should have known better" that we refuse to forgive ourselves. God's telling us that if He's capable of doing all these powerful things and is willing to forgive us of our sins, why do we refuse to forgive ourselves and be willing to trust in God in spite of what it is we've done with our lives to date?

- b) OK John, remember you're preaching to the choir. Most of us reading this are very much aware of our faults and we realize Jesus has forgiven us. The reason this lesson is here is a reminder that when God goes silent, He's still there, He still forgives us and still desires to have a relationship with us. It's a matter of trust through such times. In the meantime we are almost done with this lesson.
26. Verse 4: The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. ⁵ The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back.
- a) First consider these verses from Isaiah's perspective. It wasn't like Isaiah understood the words God was saying to him and "he held back" writing them. Isaiah acted on his faith by writing out for us what God wanted him to say.
- b) Now consider these words from Jesus' perspective. Remember that Isaiah's writing about "the" Messiah and what that means to us. Recall in the Gospel accounts how we regularly read of Jesus desiring to be alone with God the Father to pray? Jesus desired to have that intimate relationship with God the Father that He wants all of us to have. Then Jesus did communicate to people what God wanted to say and much of what Jesus said was written for us to contemplate as well. All I'm saying is these verses fit well what it is Jesus did as He ministered to those around Him.
27. Verse 6: I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.
- a) Most of us Christians have at one time or another pictured Jesus being beaten before He was taken to the cross. Movies have been made visualizing that scene. As to the idea of Jesus beard being pulled out, there's no reference to that in the New Testament. I suspect we can all picture how painful that must have been. The general idea is of "the" Messiah being treated horribly. Even though we as Christians visually picture this occurring when Jesus was about to be crucified, it's amazing to consider how Isaiah wrote all of this about 700 years before the event took place.
- b) The related point is we know it's not talking about Isaiah himself as he didn't suffer that way or Israel as a nation as the verse is talking about an individual, not a group.
28. Verse 7: Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame.
- a) Consider how Jesus just "took it", and never pleaded to be released. He never said I'm not guilty so let me go. Jesus understood His mission was to die for all our sins, which is why so He put up with all of this, for that reason. Let's face it, if Jesus wasn't resurrected, that event would be told as the greatest tragedy in human history. It was the resurrection that made that event "not a disgrace". OK, I'm preaching to the choir again, so I'll move on.
29. Verse 8: He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me!
- a) I can state the obvious some more that Jesus trusted in God the Father, so He had no fear of what He was about to suffer. However, let's look at this verse from our standpoint: If we suffer for being a witness for Jesus, how much will we suffer compared to those who do the harm? I just read a report about the large number of Christians around the world that suffered just for celebrating Christmas. My point is don't underestimate how God is caring for us believers even if we do simple things to recall His love for us. When He goes "silent" on us, we can still be a witness for Him and not fear whatever charges are brought against us because our God is greater than our accuser.
30. Verse 9: It is the Sovereign LORD who helps me. Who is he that will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up.
- a) Here is the not so subtle reminder of the fate of nonbelievers versus the fate of believers. It reminds us of the "end" of both, and what our attitude should be when we do suffer as we fear God's not there to help us.

- b) Let me ask, "What if we suffer at the hands of other believes?" The answer is similar. It's a matter of realizing that life is longer than our lifespan and even if we're mistreated now, our eternal life is longer. If I've learned one thing in life it is, "There is a God and I'm not Him." It's a matter of making the best decisions we can and let God do what we can't do to help out in any situation. OK, realizing the fact that we're not condemned for how we have lived this life but those who oppress us for the Gospel's sake will suffer, let's move on to the last two verses of this chapter.
31. Verse 10: Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God. ¹¹ But now, all you who light fires and provide yourselves with flaming torches, go, walk in the light of your fires and of the torches you have set ablaze. This is what you shall receive from my hand: You will lie down in torment.
- a) For what it's worth, these last two verses will lead perfectly into the next lesson. They are essentially asking the question, "Why should we trust You anyway?" Imagine suffering in some tough way and here's God essentially saying, "It's ok trust Me, despite all that you're experiencing right now!" God's response to that question is my next lesson.
 - b) The final verse refers to those trusting in other gods or other things during a difficult time. God's response is effectively, "If you bet on something other than Me, you'll eternally pay for that choice." That's what the "flaming torches" refer to you, think of them as lights for some other deity or life choice other than God. On that strange note I'm running long and I'm way overdue to wrap this up.
32. If you get nothing else out of this lesson, it's simply to remember that when times come where if you don't sense God's presence, realize He's still there and testing to see if you'll still trust in Him despite whatever we're dealing with at that moment. When God goes silent on me, I find reading my bible reminds me of how "real" all of this is and I should stick to what I believe He called me to do even when I don't sense His presence guiding Me over and above what His word teaches. That's the lesson in a few thoughts. Speaking of a few thoughts, time to close this in prayer:
33. Heavenly Father, whether we sense Your presence or not at any given moment, help us to make a difference for You in the world around us. Help us by Your power to use our time and whatever gifts we have for Your glory. Whatever we're dealing with at the moment, may we realize You're watching us and want to guide us for Your glory. Help us to do what we can't do for ourselves. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.